

## WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: OCCUPANCY TAX COORDINATION

DATE: AUGUST 19, 2015

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

SUPERVISORS KENNY  
MERLINO  
CONOVER  
DICKINSON  
SIMPSON  
STROUGH

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

MICHAEL R. SWAN, COUNTY TREASURER  
LEISA GRANT, PRINCIPAL ACCOUNT CLERK, TOURISM  
PAUL DUSEK, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR  
MARTIN AUFFREDOU, COUNTY ATTORNEY  
AMANDA ALLEN, CLERK OF THE BOARD  
FRANK E. THOMAS, BUDGET OFFICER  
SUPERVISORS BROCK  
WOOD  
FRED AUSTIN, THE FORT WILLIAM HENRY  
CHRISTINA CURLEY, SPECIAL EVENTS COORDINATOR, LAKE GEORGE REGIONAL  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & CVB  
FRANK DITTRICH, WARREN COUNTY LODGING ASSOCIATION  
DAVE KENNY, WARREN COUNTY RESIDENT AND BUSINESS OWNER  
LAURA KOHLS, CLARION INN & SUITES  
KEVIN MARKHAM, THE RAMADA INN  
DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*  
SARAH MCLENITHAN, DEPUTY CLERK OF THE BOARD

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Mr. Kenny called the meeting of the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee to order at 10:00 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Simpson, seconded by Mr. Conover and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Copies of the meeting agenda were distributed to the Committee members and a copy of same is on file with the meeting minutes.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Michael R. Swan, *County Treasurer*, who distributed copies of the Occupancy Tax Report to the Committee members, a copy of which is on file with the meeting minutes. Commencing the review of the Report, Mr. Swan pointed out a 1.15% increase in revenues as compared to last year at this time. He stated he was not too concerned with this small increase because most of Warren County's businesses reported revenues quarterly and therefore they would not see the influx of revenues for the summer months until September. Mr. Swan then outlined the remainder of the Report, noting the balances remaining in the "Payments to Towns" account as being less than \$1, while the Discretionary Fund contained \$22,000 and the Warren County Projects account had a balance of \$71,000. Finally, Mr. Swan advised the Designated Reserve remained at \$1 million, as per the new arrangement.

Mr. Strough entered the meeting at 10:02 a.m.

Moving on to the Action Agenda item, Mr. Kenny outlined a referral from the Economic Growth & Development Committee requesting \$25,000 in funding from the Warren County Projects account (*Budget Code A.6417480.04, Tourism Occupancy, Tourism-Warren County Projects*) for Warren County's share of the costs of a traffic study for the Route 9 Corridor extending from the vicinity of The Great Escape (*Six Flags*) to State Route 149. He explained the updated study was being pursued and recommended by Warren County EDC based on changed circumstances and other developments since the last study was performed. Mr. Kenny noted the EDC would also be seeking funding from another source, as well as the Town of Queensbury. He opined this was an appropriate use of occupancy tax funds as Warren County received more sales tax dollars per square foot from tourists in this area than from any other in the County.

Motion was made by Mr. Conover and seconded by Mr. Merlino to bring the request to the floor for discussion.

Mr. Merlino stated that while he agreed with Mr. Kenny's comments in regard to the amount of sales tax income received from the area in question, he would point out that the last traffic study for this same area was completed in 2009; he added that he did not believe there was much new information to be garnered from a new study which would warrant the expenditure in the area of \$100,000. He advised the last study was good and offered many suggestions; however, he stated, as was sometimes typical in government, work was delayed and the traffic issues were never addressed.

Mr. Strough countered that a lot had happened since the last study was performed six years ago, including new development in the area. He said new ideas to alleviate traffic issues had also come to light and they had recently learned there were some developers willing to donate property and funding to future construction projects if the County was able to develop a comprehensive plan to improve traffic flow. Mr. Strough stated there was an entity, the name of which could not be made public at this time, that had pledged a considerable amount of funding to the updated study if the municipal entities involved would contribute a certain amount of funding, as well. He continued that if the County and the Town of Queensbury were willing to contribute \$25,000 each they could commission a comprehensive study which would build upon the previous study and hopefully reach a concrete solution which they could move forward from. Mr. Strough concluded that while the previous study would serve as a good base, they would need to go beyond and seek out an improved study.

Mr. Merlino questioned whether Mr. Strough had reviewed the last study, noting that there were a lot of good ideas offered in it; Mr. Strough responded that he had been very involved in the last study and he noted that many new ideas had come out since it was completed. Mr. Merlino commented that if this was the case, he would not continue to oppose the new study; however, he noted, he was still concerned about spending this amount of money to re-do work which was already completed. Mr. Strough assured Mr. Merlino that the amount of money the County would spend on the study was small in comparison to the value they would receive from it. Mr. Kenny interjected that the County needed to take action to alleviate the traffic congestion along Route 9, which, at times, backed up to the Northway exits and he commented it was only a matter of time before a fatality occurred due to these issues.

Mr. Strough pointed out that the last study only reviewed the Route 9 Corridor from Route 149 to Gurney Lane, while the new study would extend from Route 149 to Round Pond Road where there was another problematic intersection. He apprised that Eric Gilbert, *Manager of The Great Escape (Six Flags)*, had contacted him seeking action to address the pedestrian safety and traffic safety issues occurring in the Round Pond Road area; he noted that this new study would be bigger and better than the last and would address these issues, as well.

Paul Dusek, *County Administrator*, advised he had learned of concerns regarding repeating a prior traffic study and had presented them to Ed Bartholomew, *President, Warren County EDC*, who maintained this updated study was necessary. He continued, now that the County was selling the Westmount Health Facility and considering development of County-owned properties located to the west of Westmount Health Facility and adjacent to The Great Escape (*Six Flags*), as well as the potential for another landlocked parcel located to the north, he felt Warren County would have a lot of concern and interest in an updated traffic study and the information that may come from it in relation to the development of its properties. Mr. Dusek reminded the Committee that they had been doing a lot of title and survey work to prepare the properties for sale; however, he stated, some of the information that had come to him recently about potentials that were not previously discussed in older reports had caused him to decide to recommend to the Board that they hold off on selling the parcels until the updated traffic study was received. He explained that some of the potentials could allow the County to use pieces of these properties to do some good in alleviating traffic congestion issues, while still

leaving the parcels developable. He concluded that he would strongly encourage the Committee to consider the updated traffic study as he felt this was the one that could lead to improvement.

Mr. Dickinson said he was somewhat in agreement with Mr. Merlino's comments, but noted that in light of Mr. Strough's support for the study, which would occur within the town he supervised, he was prepared to support the request.

Mr. Kenny stated there was an unnamed source that had committed to contributing \$100,000 to the study and Mr. Dusek confirmed this was correct. Mr. Dusek expounded that the source could not be named as of yet; however, he added, if the County and Town of Queensbury provided their commitments, Mr. Bartholomew would be prepared to reveal the source and the total amount to be contributed which would be far more than the Town and County would be providing.

Mr. Brock stated it seemed a lot of improvements would need to be made to alleviate these traffic issues and he questioned where the funding would come from for this project. Mr. Dusek replied that until they had a better understanding of what the actual needs were it would be difficult to assign a price to the project. He commented the cost would likely be substantial and they would probably have to reach out to the State for assistance and may have to contribute funds at the County and Town level, as well. Mr. Dusek opined that when they reached a final solution he felt it would be so important that they would want to consider it; he added that, as previously mentioned by Dave Kenny, *Warren County Resident and Business Owner*, it was likely that if they did not address these travel issues, they would lose sales tax revenue from the outlet area. Mr. Strough interjected this matter would be handled by the A/GFTC (*Adirondack/Glens Falls Transportation Council*) who provided oversight for transportation in this region; therefore, he stated, any improvements shown to be factually beneficial, would typically be funded on a Federal and State level, although the Town of Queensbury may have to make a contribution, as well.

Mr. Merlino stated he had not been aware of the unannounced entity willing to contribute a substantial amount of funding to the study and therefore would change his stance on the matter.

Fred Austin, *of The Fort William Henry*, apprised of a "Letter to the Editor" he had read in *The Post Star* about six weeks ago relating to this issue. He said the letter was from a retired State Traffic Engineer who was very knowledgeable and had opined the only way to fix the issue was by undertaking a very large and expensive project to build a bridge over Route 9 that would connect with the Northway for traffic coming from Route 149. Mr. Austin stated he had found this letter to be very interesting because the person who had written it had no vested interest in the project, just a lot of knowledge to contribute.

Mr. Thomas commented he believed this would be the third study done for the same basic area of Route 9; he opined that they would need to make a decision and take action after this latest version was done because they could not continue to just keep funding new studies every six years. Mr. Kenny responded that he believed this would be the study that would lead to action to alleviate the traffic issues.

There being no further discussion, Mr. Kenny called the question and the aforementioned motion to authorize the appropriation of \$25,000 towards an update to the Route 9 Corridor study, with the source of funding being Budget Code A.6417 480.04, was carried unanimously, thereby authorizing the necessary resolution for the August 21<sup>st</sup> Board Meeting.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Martin Auffredou, *County Attorney*, who distributed copies of the Second Quarter Performance Report he had recently received from the Adirondack Civic Center Coalition (ACCC); *a copy of the Report is on file with the meeting minutes*. He noted this was a revised version of the report which was to be provided on a quarterly basis, but was a little late. Mr. Auffredou advised he had met with ACCC representatives to ensure that the expenses listed matched up with

contractual requirements and had made a number of suggestions as to how the report could be better presented, as well as to point out those expenses listed which he did not feel qualified, which had led to the revised report presented. He concluded that ACCC representatives would be present at the September Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee meeting, allowing the Committee members ample time to review the report and prepare any questions they may have.

Frank Dittrich, *Warren County Lodging Association*, said he appreciated the comments made relative to the updated Route 9 Corridor study, particularly those indicating that follow-through would be important. He apprised earlier that morning Chairman Geraghty and Messrs. Strough and Dusek had attended a meeting at SUNY Adirondack pertaining to the Upstate Revitalization Initiative being undertaken by the State of New York. Mr. Dittrich indicated that there was a lot of money being contributed to this effort and the question was what the Capital Region, which included Warren County, could gain by putting together key initiatives to move forward in an effort to obtain much needed funding from the State to support the type of development that was so often discussed by the Board. He said one thing he would like the County to consider was what the primary strategies the Capital Region would push forward on would be as this was still unclear. Mr. Dittrich commented that from his prospective, tourism was currently the number two industry in the County but had the opportunity to be the number one industry based on the demographics of the area. He explained resident's education and willingness to stay in the area could lend itself to the tourism industry and could help to raise levels of employment and income for the community. The request to the Supervisors, Mr. Dittrich stated, was to keep in touch with this initiative because a stronger message from the County to the Capital Region could help influence a better outcome for funding opportunities to be funneled into strategic initiatives that pivoted around tourism as a broadly defined activity.

As there was no further business to come before the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee, on motion made by Mr. Strough and seconded by Mr. Dickinson, Mr. Kenny adjourned the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sarah McLenithan, Deputy Clerk of the Board  
*As transcribed by Amanda Allen, Clerk of the Board*